

**Representative Mike Cooper**21<sup>st</sup> Legislative District

November 2003

**H**ere's a cornerstone of our society: People have a right to feel safe in their homes, on their streets, and around their communities. Parents should be confident that their kids are free from danger at school — and on their way to and from school. Put another way: It's not too much for citizens and families to expect that our *scales of justice* are fair, unbending, and accountable.

Call it a work in progress, our responsibility to ensure citizen-confidence both in the safety of family and in the consistency of justice. The mission of a community's elected representatives — when it comes to crime and punishment no less than any other area — must reflect the thoughtful will of the people. As long as there are folks who get themselves into trouble and put the rest of us at-risk, that's how long we must ensure that justice is served.

Today, I want to take a few minutes to review major public-safety legislation we discussed and approved earlier this year in Olympia.

***Halt this cycle before it 'grows up'***

**Y**ou don't have to be a social scientist or even a television psychologist to know that criminal adults were once criminal teenagers (or even younger). People don't get to be 25 or 30 years old — and *then* decide to live on the wrong side of the law. Maybe they learned violence and other criminal behavior from their parents, or the movies, or what have you. But the point is that we need to stop it before it gets totally out-of-hand. We've got to halt this cycle in our kids before they become our adult neighbors.

Measures that have been signed into state law this year will:

- ✓ Bolster family programs to reduce youth crime.
- ✓ Provide more information to parents about mental-health treatment for minor children.
- ✓ Authorize additional sentencing alternatives for juvenile offenders to keep these kids



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closer to their families who can support them — and closer to service providers who can help them.

- ✓ Prevent transition facilities for sex predators from being built near a public or private youth camp.

Another measure passed this session requires sex offenders to notify the county sheriff if they are either hired or fired by a community college or university. Also, the penalty for drunken drivers is increased if a youngster was riding in the vehicle.

### ***A scourge in our midst***

**A**s I said, our mission to affirm public safety is very much a work in progress. In no area of a community's peace of mind is this duty more important than in our war on the scourge of methamphetamine-use and production. This is the No. 1 drug problem in our state. More than 220 meth labs were dismantled in Washington last year — a huge increase over the year 2001 when 38 of these infernal things were seized. And we all know that Snohomish County is hit just as hard as anywhere else.

In the upcoming 2004 session, the Legislature will continue battling against this blight. One bill in particular identifies two equally important objectives: The proposal would stiffen punishment of people who manufacture and use methamphetamine, and it would strengthen cleanup work on meth sites — which is a dangerous job in itself.



**For more information — and to share your comments:**

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**Representative Mike Cooper**

19707 64<sup>th</sup> Avenue West

No. 207

Lynnwood, WA 98036

Phone: (425) 670-8371

E-mail: [cooper\\_mi@leg.wa.gov](mailto:cooper_mi@leg.wa.gov)

